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The Miracle of Manila

Members of both parties were taking curtain calls, praising the president, exulting in the joys of democracy being ecstatically celebrated by a brave island people who will no longer be regarded as "our little brown brothers," as President William Howard Taft condescendingly called them.

From the Republican Policy Committee luncheon, sounds of cheers and laughter emanated as the senators hailed two of their own who had played splendid supporting roles in the glorious drama. Sober-sided, conforming Sen. Richard G. Lugar of Indiana, who led an observer team and came home agog about the abuses he had seen, had had the temerity to contradict the president when the latter said "everybody does it." And Sen. Paul Laxalt of Nevada, the president's confidante and trouble-shooter in the Philippines, recounted the gripping conversation he had had with the falling tyrant in the last hours. It was Laxalt who handed Marcos the ace of spades and nudged him toward the airport.

All had helped. While President Reagan dithered about who had committed the most fraud, the Senate overwhelmingly passed a resolution condemning the election.

We had done the right thing. It could be argued that a people so on fire for democracy—they stood against advancing tanks and repelled them with prayers and flowers—didn't need all that much help. But it was an acute relief, not to say pleasure, to be on the right side for a change.

The president, almost in spite of himself, had pulled off the first genuine bipartisan foreign policy triumph of his administration. He had dislodged his second dictator in as many weeks. Everyone had pulled together. And wasn't he lucky, they marveled. Poor Jimmy Carter had to pull the plug on the shah of Iran and found himself face to face with the ayatollah. But Reagan, having abandoned Ferdinand Marcos, drew Corazon Aquino, who is making brilliant conciliatory moves that could not only heal a battered country but confound a communist insurgency.

Senate Majority Leader Robert J. Dole (Kan.) came out of the jubilant Republican lunch and jocosely told reporters, "The Philippines was easy. Now comes the hard part."

By the "hard part," Dole meant the furiously contested presidential policies on Angola and Nicaragua, countries where Reagan has turned his back on

the uses of negotiations and is providing firepower for factions that cannot possibly win on the battlefield.

Lethal aid to the contras in Nicaragua is going to mean a return to the acrimony, divisions and the vigorous bounty-hunt for collaborators in both parties. And there is strong evidence that the fight for Reagan's dirty little war is going to be nasty.

House Republican Leader Robert H. Michel (Ill.) and Rep. Dick Cheney (R-Wyo.) wrote Reagan to urge him to go all out for military aid to the contras. They sounded the "soft on communism" theme that intimidates Democrats. "If the communists and their Soviet-Cuban allies are going to be successful in Nicaragua, let the record show that it was the direct result of unwillingness of Democratic members . . . to support the administration's request for military assistance to the anticommunist insurgency."

On a bumper-sticker that would read: "Who lost Nicaragua?"

Even bolder is the ploy of CIA Director William J. Casey, who proposes to release a classified document that he says is an inside report of the "Sandinista Disinformation and Public Manipulation Plan"—the work, it is said, of a U.S. "mole."

This is the CIA that for five years has refused to publish a single document or photograph that would bear out its charges of Nicaraguan arms traffic into El Salvador for fear of "compromising" its agents. What happens to the "mole" when he is published?

Sen. David F. Durenberger (R-Minn.), chairman of the intelligence committee, was incensed by Casey's bullying. The intent, he says, is to "portray every senator and congressman who votes against lethal aid as a stooge of communism."

The thing is that Americans are proud of what we did in the Philippines and uncomfortable, even indignant, about what we are doing in Nicaragua. Bringing about democracy at gunpoint—and killing peasants in the process—contradicts the lesson of Manila, which is about negotiation, commitment and nonviolence.

"The elements for another brilliant, major bipartisan coup are there," says Sen. John F. Kerry (D-Mass.), a member of Lugar's observer team and an opponent of contra aid.

The question is, will Congress, taking bows for its part in the miracle of Manila, press for an encore in Nicaragua?